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List 33

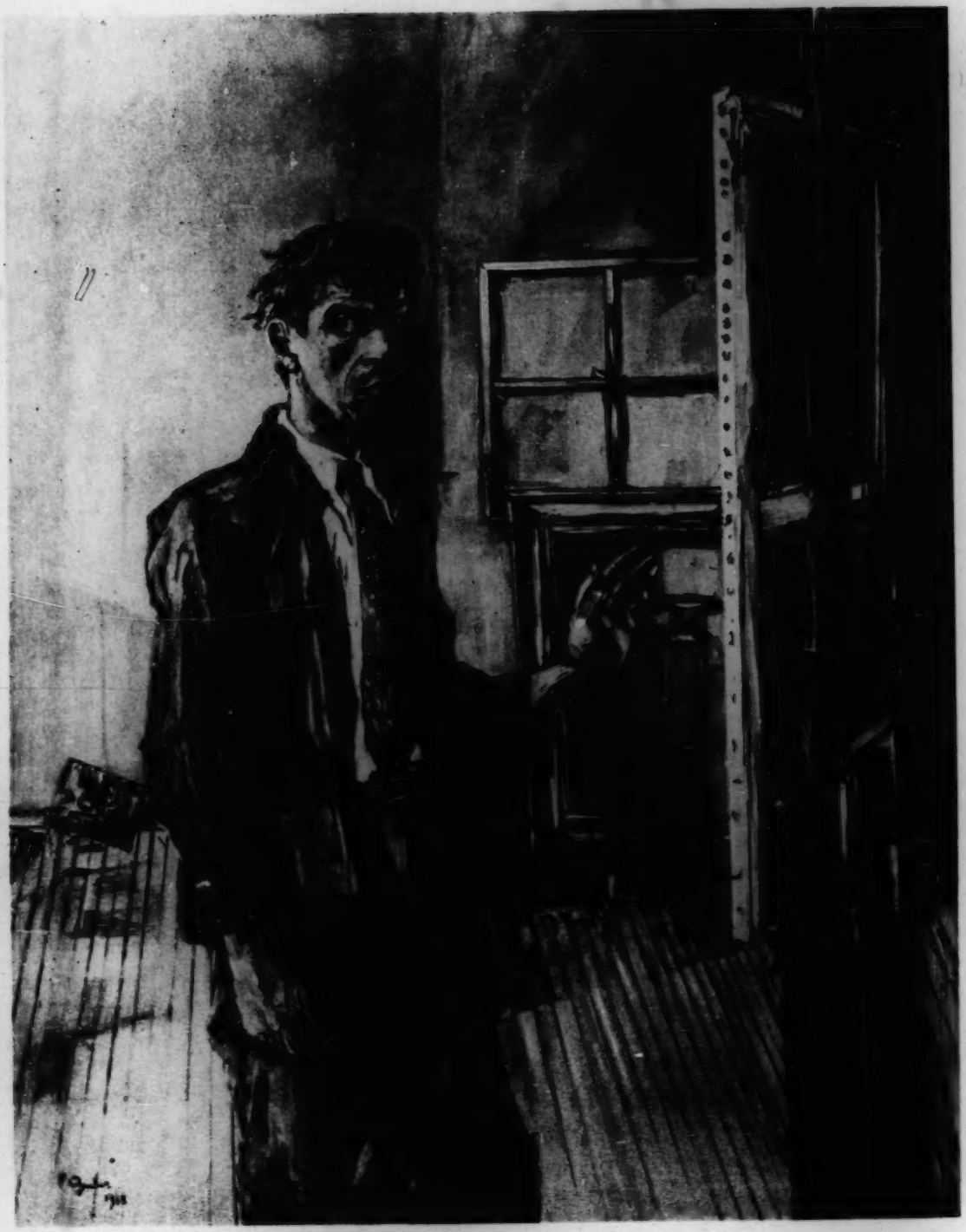
F. Gruber

Front Cover: The Poet, 1942

Francis Gruber

1912 — 1948

The Arts Council of Great Britain 1959



Foreword

ALTHOUGH Francis Gruber's reputation grows steadily year by year, he is still only sparsely represented in either public or private collections in this country. This first exhibition of his work to be shown here is thus of particular interest, the more so as it includes fine examples of paintings and drawings covering every period of the artist's adult life, from his twentieth year until his early death at the age of thirty-six.

In arranging the exhibition we owe a great deal to the untiring efforts of the artist's widow, Madame Georges Gruber, who selected the pictures and who has given us much practical assistance. Our thanks are also due to Professor René Huyghe for his illuminating and moving introduction to this catalogue, which derives from a speech he made at a meeting of Gruber's friends that took place a few weeks after the artist's death. We also wish to record our gratitude to the private collectors and museums who have generously lent pictures; to Monsieur Philippe Erlanger, Directeur de l'Association Française d'Action Artistique, under whose auspices this exhibition has been organized, who has once more put us in his debt; to the Musée National d'Art Moderne, for making available the biographical material on the artist included here; and, finally, to the Trustees and Director of the Tate Gallery for once again placing their galleries at our disposal.

GABRIEL WHITE

Self-portrait, 1942

Introduction

ANY thinking man claims the right to independence but only a few dare face the world *with empty hands*. Most cling to some protective barrier which stands between them and reality. Some are tied to inherited principles and traditions and are blind and deaf like sleepers who do not want to be awoken. Others fly blindly forward in the name of progress, these men look only to the right and to the left so as not to be overtaken, but never in front to see where they are going. The man who dares look inwards may find deep in the shadows there a revealing light which may be truth itself.

Tradition or progress, the support or attack of modern art, representation or abstraction, these are all trivial distractions hindering us from being independent and original, to use an overworked word . . .

Gruber dared to be true to himself. For this reason perhaps we see ourselves more truly reflected in him than in many figures illustrious today because they are said to be representative of their age. Representative of what? Only of ready-made ideas and common tastes. There is no true greatness in *howling with the wolves*, only servitude to the mob. The romantic movement which will shortly be celebrated in London by a large exhibition, should remind these daring sheep of the value which posterity attaches to those artists of the past who have already exhausted today's idioms. Only those will survive who took stock of their position and achieved a true expression of what they felt alive in themselves; such a one was Delacroix.

Gruber also was no ephemeral figure, disappearing when his day was over; he belongs to his age. This cannot be achieved by depicting appearances and still less by overworking current dogmas and truths valid for the day. Nothing positive can be obtained from copies and repetitions. An artist expresses his age when he has no longer confined himself to its events and to contemporary teaching but looking beyond the mocking appearance of life and the rapid changes of time he begins to search within himself to find that unity which links us all together.

Gruber's greatness lay in his rare ability, not to shine with a reflected light, but to kindle one himself from his own flame.

Art is not made from theories and ideas, but from hard work and sincerity, both dedicated to liberty. Gruber achieved both sincerity and

The Sorceress, 1938

CALLOT

liberty. He cannot be tied to any special movement, only to his own painting, and his art lies beyond the quarrels that rage round representation and abstraction. He is so far removed from conformity, both to the past and the present, that he does not deign to take a stand against them.

At most he borrowed from surrealism a sharpened perception of what is intimate and hidden, the daring to depict dark symbols and subconscious forces, which our reason can only distinguish with difficulty.

Under skies of torn clouds or darkened with storm, he saw lost islands arise, covered with dead and broken trees, and surrounded by rocky and ragged shores. There wander *the innocents with empty hands.* A dead love, a bleeding foetus, lies between them and *the drowned woman.* It is to be found again at the feet of *the poet.* Walls and roof have gone and an open door reveals an infinite emptiness. Later, he painted with misleading clarity, his studio, the skylight with its slender bars and the livid daylight. His sad solitude is sometimes shared by an emaciated nude. Sometimes it is simply *the coming of winter*, and then through the long hours of war-time occupation he is haunted by the despair and anguish of Job. From one world to the other flies the crow, which was for him either the black image from Poe's 'Nevermore', balancing on a bare branch, or the stuffed bird on its wooden perch, which his friends found watching his bier. Then, towards the end of his short life, when death was approaching, there dawned a meagre spring, acid coloured and full of light, disclosing gardens and rivers peopled with graceful nudes and pale lilacs.

These images of a world where the seasons are reversed, where spring replaces autumn and dawn comes at nightfall, when dusk should be, are all bathed in a grey light which reveals cold penetrating colours and shapes defined in thick jagged outlines. The drawing is angular, broken and spiky, it rejects any gentle curve and explodes into torn strips like a bough that has been broken off.

From this world, unique as are those of all great artists, emerges a solitary spirit, the child of unrest, revolt and despair, bathed in its last moments in a blue dawn, which is like the mysterious smile which sometimes replaces the contractions of agony on a death mask. This is perhaps our own age at its most pregnant and in its deepest intimacy.

Gruber gave more than he received. He has bequeathed his expressive and dramatic line to almost all his own generation of artists. It broke up the old geometry of forms and would seem to have been created to register the curves of fever and earthquake alike. It can be found again employed by both figurative and abstract artists. The admirers of Buffet are inclined to forget where he borrowed his draughtmanship

Homage to Callot, 1942

for he has only systematized Gruber's creation. Full of breaks and ruptures, torn and angular, tense and contracted, it may one day enable posterity to read our most intimate preoccupations.

The greatest men do not believe they have fulfilled their responsibility to their age by producing an epilogue on its significance, but by themselves creating this significance with all their spiritual force and sensibility. It has always been so, and so it was with Gruber.

RENÉ HUYGHE
Professor of the History of Art
Collège de France

Catalogue

Unframed dimensions given; height precedes width. Works marked with a star are illustrated.

1. THE SITTING-ROOM, 1932
36⅛×28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

2. DECORATION FOR THE BALL AT THE ACADÉMIE SCANDINAVE, 1932
55¾×55¾ in. Signed and dated
Private Collection, Paris

3. LITTLE IDA'S DREAM, 1932
39¼×39¼ in. Signed, undated
Lent by Dr. Zara, Paris

4. FRANÇOIS I WELCOMING THE ANTIQUES AT FONTAINEBLEAU, 1935
35×45¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

5. AIX EN PROVENCE—LANDSCAPE, 1935
40⅛×40⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy, France

6. SELF-PORTRAIT, 1935
71⅛×45½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Gunner W. Lundberg, Esq., Paris

7. THE FORTUNE-TELLER, 1936
18⅛×21¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

8. HOMAGE TO LABOUR, 1936
23¾×28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Comte Baudouin de Grunne, Wezembeek-Oppem, Belgium

9. THE MISFORTUNES OF LOVE, 1937
45¾×35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by François-Gérard Seligmann, Esq., Paris

10. ILE DE RÉ—LANDSCAPE, 1938
39¼×39¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by François-Gérard Seligmann, Esq., Paris

*11. THE SORCERESS, 1938
28¾×23¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

12. THE STORM, 1938
40½×40½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet, Esq., Paris

13. PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN, 1939
39¼×32 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Alain Lalonde, Esq., Paris

14. THE INNOCENTS WITH EMPTY HANDS, 1939
25½×32 in. Signed and dated
Private collection, Paris

15. THE STUDIO, 1940
45¾×35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

16. PORTRAIT OF MLLE. NORMAN, 1940
45¾×35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

17. MELANCHOLIA, 1941
39¼ × 32 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

18. THE DROWNED WOMAN, 1941
18⅛ × 21¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

*19. HOMAGE TO CALLOT, 1942
35 × 45¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

*20. THE POET, 1942
45¾ × 35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

*21. SELF-PORTRAIT, 1942
45¾ × 35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

22. THE FOOTBRIDGE, 1942
32 × 39¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

23. THE LOCK, 1942
25½ × 32 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

24. THE LOCK, 1942
32 × 39¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Henri Hervet, Esq., Paris

25. STILL-LIFE WITH LILAC, 1942
39¼ × 32 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Camille Narcy, Esq., Paris

26. PORTRAIT OF MADAME BAZAINE, 1943
51⅛ × 38⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

*27. THE STUDIO, 1943
63 × 63 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

28. VAL D' ISÈRE—LANDSCAPE, 1943
32 × 39¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

29. THE PINK TREE, 1943
32 × 25½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

*30. NUDE IN A RED JACKET, 1944
45¾ × 35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

31. THE RED BED, 1944
28¾ × 36⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

32. THE BARRICADE, 1944
25½ × 32 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

33. NUDE IN A RED JACKET, SEATED, 1944
21¾ × 18⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Jacques Loste, Paris

34. STILL-LIFE WITH A DRAWING, 1944
39¼ × 39¼ in. Signed and dated
Private collection, Paris

35. SPRING LANDSCAPE, 1944
25½ × 32 in. Signed and dated
Lent by J. Baigneres, Esq., Fontainebleau

36. STILL-LIFE, 1944
39¼ × 39¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Louis Mougin, Paris

37. THE HOUSETOPS OF PARIS, 1945
32 × 39¼ in. Signed and dated
Private collection, Paris

Nude in a red jacket, 1944

38. THE NAKED MAN, 1945
45¾ × 35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Dr. Zara, Paris

39. THE CHURCH STEEPLE AT AMILLIS, 1945
32 × 25½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Comte Baudouin de Grunne, Wezembeek-Oppem, Belgium

*40. WOMAN ON A COUCH (PORTRAIT OF MADAME GRUBER), 1945
51⅛ × 63¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

41. THE TREE, 1945
36⅛ × 28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Boris Taslitzky, Esq., Paris

42. BELLE ILE—LANDSCAPE, 1946
36⅛ × 28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

43. JUDITH, 1946
36⅛ × 28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Jacques Loste, Paris

44. GREENHOUSES, 1947
36⅛ × 28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

45. THE CHURCH STEEPLE AT THOMERY, 1947
36⅛ × 28¾ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

46. LA MER AUX FÉES, 1948
28¾ × 36⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Maurice Renou, Esq., Paris

47. STILL-LIFE, 1948
40⅛ × 40⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Maurice Renou, Esq., Paris

48. NUDE ON A RED COUCH, 1948
32 × 25½ in. Signed and dated
Private collection, Paris

49. ILE DE FRANCE—LANDSCAPE, 1948
28¾ × 36¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. François Baron, Paris

50. NUDE IN A RED JACKET WITH ONE FOOT ON A CHAIR, 1948
21¾ × 18⅛ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

*51. TWO NUDE FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE, 1948
45¾ × 35 in. Signed and dated
Lent by Alain Lalonde, Esq., Paris

52. WOMAN IN A LANDSCAPE, 1948
32 × 25½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

DRAWINGS

53. WOMAN AND CHILD, 1933
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Private collection, Paris

54. PORTRAIT OF ULLA, 1934
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

55. PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST, 1934
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

Woman on a couch (portrait of Madame Gruber), 1945

56. SEATED WOMAN, 1935
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jacques Bazaine, Esq., Paris

57. CLOTHED WOMAN, RECLINING, 1935
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet, Esq., Paris

58. PORTRAIT OF PIERRE TAL-COAT, 1937
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Boris Taslitzky, Esq., Paris

59. STUDY OF NUDES, 1938
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Julian Snow, London

60. RECLINING NUDE, 1940
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by André Marchand, Esq., Paris

61. SEATED WOMAN, 1940
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Diégo Giacometti, Paris

62. NUDE, 1940
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Diégo Giacometti, Esq., Paris

63. WOMAN SEATED ON A CHAIR, 1942
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Private collection, Paris

64. RECLINING NUDE, 1943
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed, and dated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

65. STUDY OF NUDES, 1946
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by George Roux, Esq., Paris

66. NUDE SEATED ON A CHAIR, 1944
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by René Huyghe, Esq., Paris

67. STUDY OF MALE NUDE, 1944
24½ × 19¼ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Jean-Marie Calmettes, Esq., Paris

68. NUDE ON A COUCH, 1945
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Dr. Zara, Paris

69. STUDY, 1948
24½ × 19¼ in. Unsigned, undated
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

70. STANDING NUDE, 1948
24½ × 19¼ in. Unsigned, undated
Lent by Dr. Jean-Pierre Caron, Paris

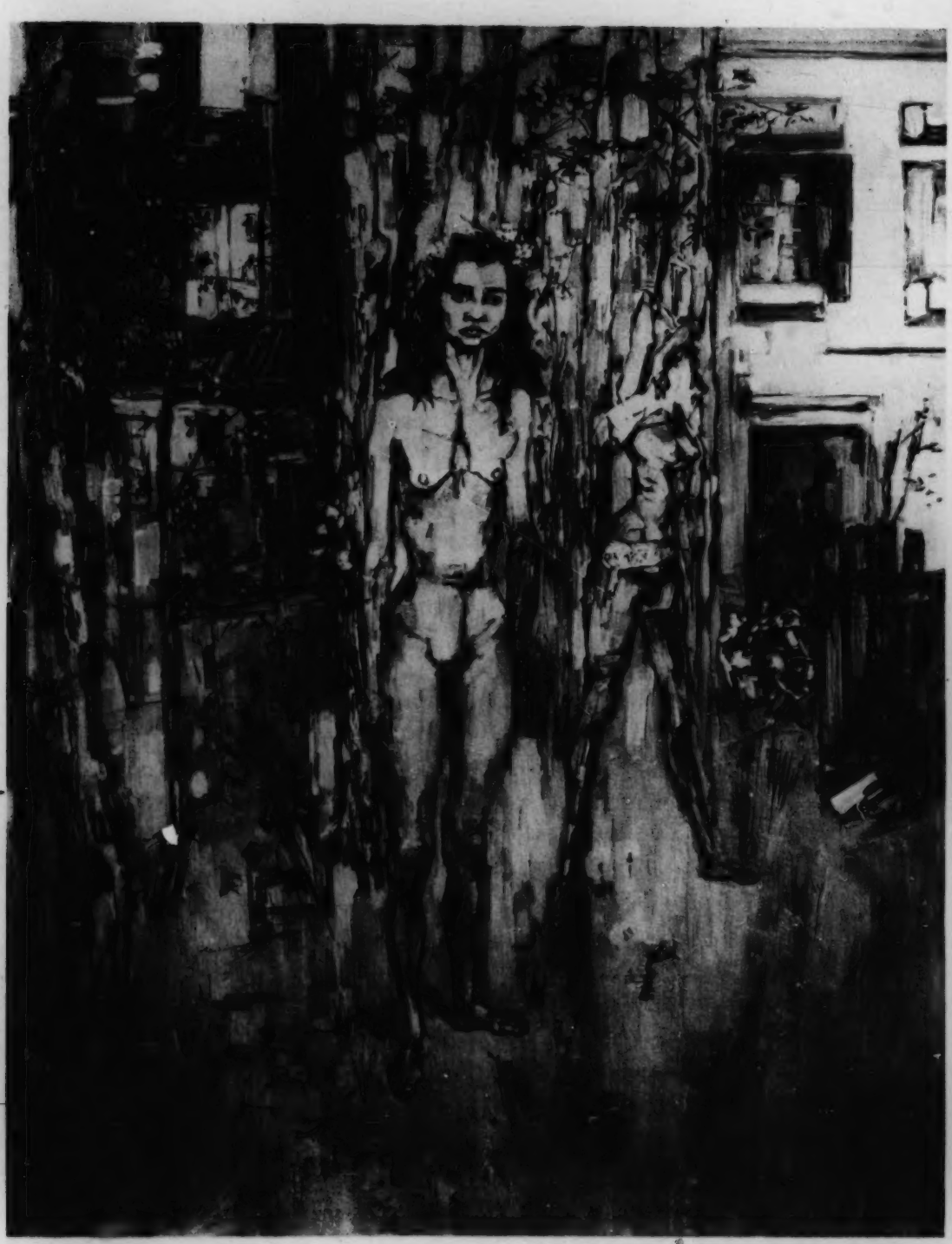
GOUACHE

71. COMPOSITION, 1939
19¼ × 24½ in. Signed and dated
Lent by Mrs. Nadia Casanova, Paris

LITHOGRAPHS

72. THREE ILLUSTRATIONS FOR *Fifteen short prose poems from* Le Spleen de Paris *by Charles Baudelaire*
Lent by Mrs. Francis Gruber, Paris

Two nude figures in a landscape, 1948



Biography

1912 Born 15th March, at Nancy: son of Jacques Gruber, stained-glass artist and Alsatian by birth, and Jeanne Elisa Jagielski, who came from a Polish family that accompanied King Stanislas Leczinski to Lorraine.

1916 The Gruber family moved to Paris.

1920-28 Confined to bed during part of his childhood through ill-health. Formal education neglected but supplemented by copious reading which revealed a curious precocity: Andersen, Selma Lagerlof, Ibsen, Joyce, Rimbaud, Péladan, Jarry, Tristan Derème, Apollinaire, Romain Rolland, Gide, Cocteau and Aragon were his favourite writers. Showed an eagerness to paint from the age of eight. Admired Bosch, Grünewald and Dürer. Braque and Bissière were neighbours and the young Gruber often sought their advice.

1929-32 Worked at the Académie Scandinave where he met Francis Tailleux who became his most intimate and devoted friend and remained so throughout his life. It was during these years that he gave fullest scope to his fertile imagination. Only in a few still-lifes did he show that he had not made a total break with reality.

1933-36 Home-loving by nature and because of his ill-health not often able to venture out of doors, he painted what he saw pass by his window. But mostly he worked near his stove from a model.

1936 His father died. The State commissioned a large mural for the Lycée Lakanal de Sceaux.

1937 He completed a stained-glass window for the Pavillon de la Ville de Paris in the Exposition de 1937. Stayed with Francis Tailleux at St.-Martin-de-Ré. Worked in the open air.

1938 Associated closely with Alberto and Diégo Giacometti, whom he had known since 1933. Completed stained-glass window for the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

1939 Stayed at Doëlan, Finistère, with Tal-Coat and Francis Tailleux.

1942 Married Georges Bernstein. Stayed frequently at Thomery where he loved the woods, the forest of Fontainebleau, and above all 'La Mer aux Fées', which he imagined peopled with mischievous sprites and fairies drawn from the legends he had read about in his childhood. He was also moved by certain views of the Seine where the architecture of the factories and locks harmonized with nature, and through these

he was able to link his dreams with reality. He discovered an ancient Bible in his house at Thomery which prompted him to paint several dramatic biblical themes.

1942-43 Taught at the Académie Ranson.

1943 Death of his mother. Birth of his daughter Catherine.

1944 His health became very uncertain. Painted a number of still-lifes of stuffed birds and lizards.

1945 Painted a series of portraits of his wife. Visited Auvergne which inspired several landscapes.

1946-47 Long stays at Trinité-sur-Mer and Belle-Ile. His health became worse and he painted very little. Fascinated by the mysterious 17th century fortifications on the island (he depicted them later in his last canvases).

1947 Lauréat du Prix National.

1948 Health more and more precarious. His palette became much clearer but the strangeness and mystery which characterize his work were not lost. Painted a series of adolescent figures set in surroundings remembered from Belle-Ile and Thomery. Died 1 December in the hospital at Boucicaut.

The Chiswick Press

The studio, 1943

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN